

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 17, 2020

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Bernhardt,

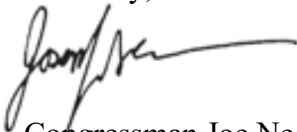
Due to the unprecedented threat of the COVID-19 novel coronavirus pandemic to the United States, I write to request that you take immediate action to ensure that the operating procedures for our nation's public lands follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidance to prioritize the health of Federal employees and the public. Additionally, I request that you grant local and regional land managers the necessary authority to respond to the unique challenges they face in preventing the spread of COVID-19.

As the representative for Colorado's Second Congressional District, I represent Rocky Mountain National Park, the third most-visited National Park in the United States. In 2019 alone, 4.67 million people visited the park, setting a new attendance record for the fifth time in six years. This popularity is not surprising - those who frequent the park understand that its unparalleled landscapes provide outstanding physical and mental health benefits.

Spending time outdoors has the potential to be a safe and healthy outlet for individuals during this public health crisis. However, as you know, CDC guidance has emphasized that the most effective way to prevent COVID-19 is to distance oneself from others. In popular places like Rocky Mountain National Park, areas such as visitor's centers and shuttle buses can easily contravene this life-saving guidance. Therefore, we must balance the health benefits of spending time outdoors with any health risks of crowded park activities. In the absence of systematic guidance from the National Park Service ("NPS") related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it imperative that our park superintendents, who are in close contact with their local government and community partners, have the ability to adjust or close any services or activities that promote the spread of the virus.

Therefore, as the Federal government continues to monitor this situation, I urge you to give NPS superintendents full authority and flexibility to take necessary action, working in conjunction with local and state authorities, to protect public health within their respective parks. Rocky Mountain National Park has held a special place in the fabric of our nation's history since it was established in 1915. Any decisions to adjust access to public lands are never taken lightly. However, in these unprecedented circumstances, public health must be our top priority. Thank you for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Neguse", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Congressman Joe Neguse